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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Hanoi's 23 September Memorandum
on Negotiating the Vietnam War

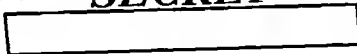
SUMMARY

The North Vietnamese have now responded to continuing US policy statements on settling the war in Vietnam with an official government memorandum detailing their own current "views." This statement, in the form of a foreign ministry paper, is the most extensive pronouncement on Hanoi policy since Premier Pham Van Dong's four point proposal of 8 April. Hanoi probably regards the document as its side of a dialogue with Washington on terms for ending the conflict. The memorandum also serves as a response to the many recent proposals by free world leaders on ending the war. Its timing may have been set by a Hanoi desire once more to go on record prior to the opening of the UN General Assembly session, where the Vietnam situation is likely to be a prime issue.

The memorandum offers no new proposals for settling the conflict, and no explicit concessions in DRV terms. It does, however, by dint of its phraseology on several points and by its omission of several hard-line concepts contained in a number of prior DRV statements, convey an impression of greater flexibility than has been present overall in any past DRV policy pronouncements. It is apparently not a signal that Hanoi is now ready to step to the negotiating table, but rather that the North Vietnamese have reviewed their bidding, made some adjustments, and are waiting to hear the response of the other principals, most notably the United States. The statement follows other indications, both public and private,

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that Hanoi is now more interested in hearing what US officials and friends of the US have to say about negotiations, and that the DRV is also trying to be more explicit in outlining its own position.

The Memorandum's Arrangement

1. It is possible that the document represents the work of a number of hands within the DRV regime and that it is to some degree a compromise paper. For a North Vietnamese policy statement, it seems unusually choppy and disorganized in its handling of some major topics. Remarks on the UN and on the four points, for example, are not lumped together entirely, but are somewhat interspersed throughout the latter section of the memorandum. Whether or not this reflects factional interplay on the part of the DRV leaders is impossible to say. The existence of both a militant and a moderate grouping within the Hanoi hierarchy has been clearly evident in the past. There has been little tangible evidence, however, of divergences of policy toward the insurgency in Vietnam.

2. The memorandum begins with a series of routine denunciations of US "aggression" in Vietnam designed to show that Hanoi and the insurgents are the aggrieved, innocent parties in the conflict. It then turns to a series of remarks on the US "conditions" for negotiations, follows this with statements on the role of the National Liberation Front in a settlement, and then discusses the UN in the Vietnam situation. Subsequently, the paper covers the DRV's four point proposal, expounds Hanoi's willingness to fight for years if necessary and closes with a summary of the four points and an assertion of confidence in the ability of the Vietnamese to defeat the US on their own.



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The US Conditions

3. This section seems to be the hardest-hitting portion of the memorandum. In terms long familiar in DRV propaganda, the US "unconditional discussions" proposal is denounced as a fraud. "Each time" the US speaks of peace negotiations, says the paper, it takes a further step in "escalating the war." Repeating a theme prominent in other recent DRV statements, the document says the "ceasefire" asked by the US is designed to give Washington time to consolidate the Saigon government and army for a further expansion of the conflict. The US is now saying, according to the memorandum, that it will only cease bombing the North if there is some "response" from Hanoi--presumably on starting talks.

4. In words intended to convey the impression that the DRV is certainly not yet ready to agree to talks under this kind of duress, the memorandum says the US has no right to impose any conditions on North Vietnam. What the US must do is to stop its "war acts" against the DRV and "end the war of aggression" in South Vietnam. Nothing is said at this point about the withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam. When the question of withdrawal is treated later in the paper, it is not labelled as an "immediate" necessity, as is the cessation of US armed action in the North and South. Although top DRV officials have balked at clarifying the necessary timing of a US pullout, Hanoi's public statements have been generally consistent in omitting any reference to the timing of a withdrawal. DRV diplomats abroad, moreover, have given private assurances that withdrawal is not a prior condition to the initiation of negotiations.

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Role of the Liberation Front

6. It has long been evident that a prime goal of the Vietnamese Communists is to bring the US around to dealing directly with the National Liberation Front (NFLSV). The Communists realize that a strong image of NFLSV prestige will be extremely important in any war settlement. It would not only help undermine the standing of the Saigon authorities, but would also assist the Communists in gaining an effective position in any postwar coalition political establishment in South Vietnam. In most DRV statements on the war, therefore, the Front is depicted as the "sole genuine representative" of the South Vietnamese people. The 23 September DRV memorandum reiterates this point, and assails the US refusal to "recognize" the NFLSV as such. It does not, however, call on the US to recognize the Front as a de facto government.

7. The document does say that there cannot be "any negotiations" on the "South Vietnam" problem without the Front having its "decisive say." This can probably be regarded as a negative answer to US suggestions that Washington would not "question the composition of the North Vietnamese delegation" in any negotiations "if it included members of the Viet Cong." It is, however, a position short of that often taken in the past by DRV spokesmen. Pham Van Dong, for example, in his 8 April four point proposal said that a war settlement must be "in accordance with the program of the NFLSV."

8. In using the phrase "decisive say," the memorandum may be hinting again that, while the Front must be included in an independent capacity in any talks, the question of its weight and authority could be subject to discussion. Other official Vietnamese Communist documents, including a DRV white paper in July, have occasionally used similar words to describe the Front's role in talks. It is interesting, moreover, that the 23 September memorandum does not explicitly rule out participation in talks on the war by representatives of the Saigon government. Some earlier DRV statements have strongly implied that Hanoi would not permit Saigon to be represented. In response to a question in an interview with the French newspaper Le Monde on 15 August, for example, Ho Chi

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Minh stated that in negotiations "there could be no question of the Saigon authorities, a creation of the Americans which is cursed by our people."

Role of the United Nations

9. In the past, Hanoi has made it clear that it flatly rejects use of the formal UN machinery to bring about or to guarantee a settlement of the war in Vietnam. A new attack along these lines is a feature of the 23 September memorandum, apparently in response to the US move toward utilizing the UN more actively in seeking to end the conflict. The memorandum assails the current US "scheme" to secure UN intervention in Vietnam. However, it confines its denunciation of the organization to the use of the formal UN machinery, declaring only that it will regard as "null and void" any UN "resolution" on the question and any "solution" which seeks UN "intervention." Despite press reports that the UN Secretary General and others in the organization are attempting privately to encourage negotiations, it does not explicitly reject such mediation attempts.

A Geneva Conference

10. In discussing the UN, the memorandum attempts to project the Geneva Conference framework as the proper machinery for use if any formal internationalized negotiations on the Vietnam situation are eventually undertaken. The Vietnam problem, says the document, falls within the competence of the "participants" of the 1954 Geneva Agreements, and not that of the UN. Suggestions that a final settlement in Vietnam might be undertaken at a new Geneva meeting have been a theme of DRV pronouncements on settling the war since at least April when Hanoi's four points were set forth. If the four points were "recognized" as a "basis" for a settlement, Hanoi declared in April, it would be possible to "consider reconvening a conference along the pattern" of the 1954 session.

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11. Hanoi has not, however, assigned any greater weight to such a conference at any time since April, suggesting that it considered a more limited participation in preliminary negotiations preferable prior to moving to the Geneva level. Concern over Chinese and Soviet influence at a Geneva-type meeting may influence the DRV's thinking. There is some evidence that Hanoi accepted less than it would like to have gained in the 1954 Geneva settlement as a result of Soviet urging and influence on the conference. The relatively light treatment given to the Geneva framework in the 23 September memorandum suggests that DRV strategy in this respect has not been altered.

The Four Point Proposal

12. The memorandum does not devote as much detail as might have been expected to Pham Van Dong's four points, although it does reiterate that they constitute the "sole correct basis for a settlement" of the Vietnam problem. According to the document, the US must "solemnly declare its acceptance" of the four points before a "political settlement can be considered." This statement echoes the line taken recently by DRV spokesmen. It is, however, somewhat softer than the mid-August assertion by Ho Chi Minh that the US must give "tangible proofs" that it accepts the four points. This was subsequently reflected for a time in DRV propaganda, but has been largely dropped of late.

13. It is interesting, moreover, that the demand for US "acceptance" of the four points is pegged to a "political settlement" of the war and not explicitly to the starting of negotiations--as is the assertion in the memorandum regarding the necessary NFLSV participation in ending the conflict. This would suggest that formal US "acceptance" of the four points is not something that Hanoi will stand fast on if and when it is ready to talk. It is not clear exactly why the four points are not spelled out in detail in the memorandum, as they have been in almost all official DRV statements on ending the war. The memorandum also omits all reference to the Liberation Front's "five point statement" of 22 March on ending the war. Reference to this Front pronouncement, the terms of which

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generally parallel the DRV four point proposal, has been a feature of most major DRV statements on a settlement.

Self-reliance

14. The concluding paragraphs in the memorandum describe what is in store for the US should it fail to accept the demands of the Vietnamese Communists and persist in military action against Hanoi and the Viet Cong. It may be in this section that some of the reasons behind Hanoi's decision to issue a restatement of its terms on the war in a seemingly more flexible manner, come to the surface. The memorandum, in paragraphs that seemingly cry out for it, fails to invoke the threat of assistance from the bloc should the US continue to "intensify and expand" the war. Although the evidence still lies almost entirely in the realm of propaganda analysis, it appears that the DRV is becoming less convinced of the efficacy and perhaps the reliability of bloc aid in a long term and more intensive prosecution of the war.

15. In August, in a rare moment of candor, it called on the socialist countries to "wage a still more resolute, timely, and vigorous struggle in keeping with their sacred duty to a fraternal country." It asked Peking and Moscow for "increased support and assistance in all fields." Since mid-August, however, appeals to the socialist bloc have been much less explicit, and Hanoi has begun to talk more about self-reliance in the struggle. In the 23 September memorandum, the US is promised only more "vigorous" resistance by the "Vietnamese" people, if American "aggression" continues. The document ends with an expression of conviction in the ability of the Vietnamese "by their own unity and strength" to defeat the US.

16. It is entirely possible that Hanoi is not really convinced of the long term ability of the Vietnamese Communists to stand up--largely on their own resources--to the attrition of the air strikes and to the steadily increasing pressure of the US military forces against the Viet Cong in the South. Hanoi may be starting, but only starting to look more seriously at a political solution of the conflict.

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